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STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN ED CASE OF HAWAII THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 2006

NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGES ACT AMENDMENTS OF 2006

Mr. Speaker, I am most pleased to introduce the Native American Languages Amendments Act of 2006. This is a reintroduction in revised form of my bill, H.R. 2362, from the 108th Congress.

This vital legislation will authorize the Secretary of Education to provide grants to or enter into contracts with Native American language educational organizations, Native American language colleges, Indian tribal governments, organizations that demonstrate the potential to become Native American language educational organizations, or consortia of such entities, to establish Native American language nests for students under the age of 7 and their families. It will also authorize grants to operate, expand, and increase the number of Native American language survival schools throughout the country for Native American children and Native American language-speaking children.

The bill also authorizes the establishment of four demonstration projects that will provide assistance to Native American language survival schools and Native American language nests. The programs selected are well known nationally: all have over ten years of highly successful operation, and are all Native American controlled.

The demonstration sites range from a statewide system to a small localized program for under fifty students, and from programs restricted to elementary students to programs that go through high school and beyond. They include programs on reservations, programs in highly remote areas, and programs in urban areas. Students enrolled in them include children who are first language speakers and students from families where the language has not been spoken for three generations. They include programs with special strengths in teacher training and in resource materials development.

The four sites selected are the four research sites in an ongoing national study of academic effectiveness by prominent Native American and non-Native American educational researchers and major research entities with extensive experience in the field. The demonstration programs are authorized to use technology in cooperating and coordinating their work with each other and with other participating Native American language programs. They will provide direction to the Secretary of Education in developing site visit evaluations of programs and may conduct follow-up data collection that will be valuable in providing direction to schools.

Lastly, the bill provides direction relative to addressing barriers that have prevented Native Americans from accessing education in Native American languages. It also directs the Secretary of Education to provide for the inclusion of Native American language nests and Native American language survival schools in federal support for private schools and charter schools.

The Native American Languages Amendments Act of 2006 is consistent with longstanding federal self-determination policies toward native peoples, which support the promotion of economic and social self-sufficiency, as well as the preservation and revitalization of native culture. languages, art, history, religion, and values. Since language is a significant factor in the perpetuation of native cultures, the federal government enacted the Native American Languages Act of 1990 urging federal support for Native American languages, and the Native American Languages Act Amendments of 1992 establishing a grant program at the Administration for Native Americans to fund the preservation of Native American languages. My bill continues this commitment by our federal government to ensure the survival of these unique cultures and languages.

In my home state, I am proud that the people of Hawaii and the State of Hawaii have strongly supported the revitalization of Hawaiian culture, art, and language. In 1978, for example, the State of Hawaii wrote into its constitution a specific declaration that Hawaiian is one of our two official languages, along with English. This was a remarkable reversal from decades in which the very survival of the Native Hawaiian language was at risk due to benign neglect and to conscious efforts to discourage its use.

There is also support for Hawaiian language programs in both our public and private schools. At the forefront of these efforts have been supporters of Aha Punana Leo, a Hawaiian language immersion program which has endeavored to include both students and parents in an exciting and innovative way to revitalize Hawaiian language and culture. Ms. Namaka Rawlins, Director of Aha Punana Leo, and her husband, Dr. William (Pila) Wilson, have been pivotal in these efforts. The lessons of family and community involvement in the preservation of the Hawaiian language that they and others have proven are and can be used by other native communities and cultures across the country.

While the Aha Punana Leo program initially started with pre-school students, Hawaiian lan-

guage survival schools were also established to allow for students to graduate from high school. Over 2,000 students are currently enrolled in Hawaiian language nests and survival schools. A Hawaiian language center--Hale Kuamoo--was eventually established at the University of Hawaii at Hilo with the collaboration of Aha Punana Leo as well as a Native College--Ka Haka Ula O Keelikolani College. Both programs have been crucial in providing training to teachers in Hawaiian language, college courses in Hawaiian, and graduate education in Hawaiian language and culture.

The revitalization of the Hawaiian language in my state has been instrumental in the preservation of Hawaiian culture, which is important to all of us who call Hawaii home. Today's legislation will take this lesson nationwide in continuing the commitment made by the federal government in 1990 and the progress that has been made since that time to preserve Native American languages, including the Hawaiian language. Mahalo, and aloha.